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An Interview with Rewald —on His Terms

WHEN Ronald Rewald speaks, you listen. He compels you to.

He leans over, his voice intense. His face can be vacant or animated. He can be witty. He can make you laugh. He can make you feel sorry for him.

An interview with Rewald is done on his terms because he answers only the questions he wants to answer. He won't talk in detail about the work of his company, Bishop, Baldwin, Rewald, Dillingham & Wong. He won't discuss his consultants, the CIA or his criminal case. (He has been indicted on two theft charges. The amount of money missing is \$17 million, according to federal bankruptcy officials.) He won't talk about his suicide attempt. Or about who may or may not be out to kill him.

He makes you feel that he really wants to tell you everything. He wants you to understand.

You feel his energy and enthusiasm as he talks and, suddenly, it is easy to see how he attracted such a large group of admirers, from island leaders to international figures.

It is easy to imagine him at the polo grounds, hobnobbing with potential investors. It is easy to see him sitting back in his comfortable office convincing people they should put money into his company.

But is he for real? Is he telling the truth? Is he lying, but believing he is telling the truth? There is no way to tell. So you just sit back and listen.

SINCE getting out of prison two weeks ago, Rewald has been boled up in a corner of his attorney's office, working on his defense against charges he stole money from two investors.

He doesn't walk the streets because of the possibility that someone would do him harm. In fact, there were reports that someone had gotten a job as a prison guard in an attempt to kill Rewald. The Attorney General's office has information about the alleged assassination attempt and the person who supposedly was to kill Rewald. But they have no evidence to believe that there actually was a plot.

Rewald thinks there may be people who want him dead. But he won't say who. He knows he has a lot of potential enemies

both in and out of the United States. But he wants any potential assassins to know that nothing would be gained by killing him.

"I have been out for 10 days and any information I had that concerned anybody has already been given to my attorneys in great detail, copied and re-copied," Rewald said. "It is in enough hands that no point would be served at this point by anything happening to me. I don't feel that that is a concern. I realize that everyone else is paranoid about it. I couldn't even come to work if I thought that that was going to happen."

REWALD IS MORE concerned with getting back to Wisconsin to see his family, which he has court permission to do. He has been offered a job to help raise money for the trip, even though the airplane ticket may be paid by friends. Rewald won't say if the job is "white collar" or "blue collar" because "I don't want to embarrass anybody. It's going to probably come out soon enough anyway. I am just grateful to have the opportunity to work. I am not giving financial advice for a profession. If that is your next question."

Although it is possible to believe that Rewald may be misleading in some of his remarks, there is no doubt that he feels strongly about his family.

He is asked: "What are you going to tell your family when you see them? What are you going to tell your children when they ask what happened?"

Tears suddenly fill his eyes. "I have tried not to even think about it. I guess I won't believe it until I see them," he said. He talks about a phone call he made to his son in California.

"He got a job with a shoe company," he said. "But I don't know any of the details. I talked to him for the first time yesterday just for a couple of minutes. It was the first time I had talked to him since July. He was crying on one end, I was crying on the other. We didn't say anything for about 10 minutes."

REWALD attempted to kill himself last July 29 by cutting his wrists in a Waikiki hotel room. As he regained his strength in Queen's Hospital, it took a while for the reality of the situation to become clear. And even when he was well enough to leave the hospital, he still didn't realize the scope of what was happening to him.

"When I was in the hospital, I could see things were going out of control with the company and I didn't understand why certain people I thought would take control didn't," Rewald said. "The real panic for me was when I left the hospital. It never dawned on me that I would be arrested. I assumed I would go home and maybe get a good night's sleep and go to the office the next day and try and talk to the trustee and work with him and show him what was going on."

It was sort of strange. We knew that there were police officers outside there watching the door. We thought they were just going to monitor our activities. So we brought one of them in and said, 'Look, I'm going to go home. If you are supposed to follow me or something, why don't you get in the car with us or we'll ride with you, or whatever. And just come with us. And we'll tell you every time we are going to go anywhere. I am anxious to rest for a day or so and then get to work.' And they said, 'You are ready to leave now? Hold it right here, we are going to have to arrest you.'"

But it was more than an hour later that he actually was taken to jail and by that time, the news media was there.

"It turned into a media event," he said. "Every step from that point on was more of a production than anything else. I couldn't stick my head out the door without having cameras and light-bulbs going off."

Rewald still feels he was somewhat railroaded by the media.

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But he has mellowed. He is not angry at KHON-TV reporter Barbara Tanabe for first going on the air with disclosures that his company was under investigation last summer.

"People patted me on the back and congratulated me for being polite to Barbara Tanabe in court the other day," he said. "I mean, what did they expect me to do? Punch her in the nose?"

ONCE in prison, Rewald began to recover from the depression he had suffered before and after his suicide attempt. Letters from his family helped. And so did letters from various church groups. And while he did not receive any "hate mail" from angry investors, he did get his share of odd letters.

"I certainly saw a lot of strange mail," he said. "People out there writing my life story. Letters of proposal. I can't explain any of that. It was just unusual mail."

He had only a few visitors and his attorneys tried to keep him busy helping prepare his defense. But there was little he could do while in prison, he said.

"From inside there you have access to practically no records," he said. "Occasionally an attorney would bring in something to work on and check over. You are helpless to defend yourself. And I realize that there are a lot of people in prison who can't get out to defend themselves. But this is not a case where someone held up a liquor store or a bank. It is not clear-cut. It involves a tremendous number of transactions, personnel and people and events all around the world. To assemble a defense for something like that is not something you can do in an absentee process."

REWALD used to be ultra-conservative. Although he won't acknowledge it, it is believed that Rewald in college worked for the CIA, infiltrating radical student

groups. The American Civil Liberties Union was seen as some pinko outfit that catered to criminals. The government was always right. The system worked.

Now, things have changed. He finds himself granting interviews to national journalists considered "leftist" by the far-right conservatives he used to call soul-mates. The Hawaii chapter of the ACLU has come to his aid in an attempt to have a federal gag order lifted on CIA material from Rewald's files.

"I've always been a very conservative person," Rewald said. "Now I find help coming from directions that I find somewhat surprising. And I am very, very grateful."

The American justice system has become somewhat tarnished in his eyes now.

"Regardless of my 'intense' criminal background," he said, referring to a misdemeanor fraud conviction in Wisconsin, "I certainly have always had the highest regard for the law. I haven't had so much as a parking ticket in all the years I have been in Hawaii. But it certainly has changed my perception of 'you're innocent until proven guilty' and things of that nature."

As far as America in general, Rewald the super-patriot, has not changed.

"I would never move somewhere else," he said. "I have been all around the world a number of times and there is no place I

would rather be than the United States."

IF HIS LEGAL problems ever end and he is able to prove his innocence, Rewald said he would like to continue living in Hawaii.

"I've become a very public figure," he said. "I can't walk down the street without people recognizing my face. I have had no control over that. I don't know what effect that would have on my family and my ability to stay here and earn a living. If I am given a fair opportunity to defend myself ... I feel I could. But this has been going on for a half a year and it is not something that is going to be repaired in a matter of days or even a few weeks."

Despite all of the years Rewald has lived in Hawaii and all of the local people he has met, Rewald still is a suit-wearer. It seems possible to believe that he has never worn an aloha shirt. It's impossible to picture him sunning on a beach, exposed to the elements.

He appears uncomfortable when he takes off the jacket of his three-piece, pin-striped suit.

Without the jacket, the dark red scars on his forearms are visible. At the end of the interview, he pulls on his jacket and the scars are once again hidden. And anyone who saw Rewald a few minutes later walking down the sidewalk would think they were looking just another prosperous businessman.